DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 477 954 PS 031 366

AUTHOR	DeLapp, Lynn R.
TITLE	Supporting Early Childhood Initiatives: Legislative Strategies for Everyday People.
INSTITUTION	Finance Project, Washington, DC.
SPONS AGENCY	Carnegie Corp. of New York, NY.
PUB DATE	2003-06-00
NOTE	37p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Finance Project, 1401 New York Avenue, NW, Suite 800, Washington, DC 20005. Tel: 202-587-1000; Fax: 202-628-4205; Web site: http://www.financeproject.org. For full text: http://www.financeprojectinfo.org/Publications/LegislativeStrategies.pdf.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS
DESCRIPTORS	*Advocacy; Budgeting; Case Studies; *Change Strategies; *Child Advocacy; Child Care; *Early Childhood Education; Educational Quality; Family Support; Federal Legislation; *Legislation; Preschool Education; *Public Policy; State Legislation; Young Children
IDENTIFIERS	Advocacy Communication; Advocacy Planning; Family Advocacy; Healthy Start Program CA

ABSTRACT

As states and communities work to improve the accessibility and quality of supports and services for young children and their families, they find that their greatest challenge is in gaining and maintaining concerted attention and resources for planning, financing, implementing, and sustaining high-quality, coherent systems. This brief addresses strategies that parents and other community members can use to influence the basic legislative processes and when to use alternatives to legislation, and includes examples and lessons learned from state and local efforts. The sections of the brief are: (1) "Supporting Early Childhood Initiatives: Legislative Strategies for Everyday People," describing growing concerns about early childhood and when to use alternatives to legislation; (2) "The ABCs of Legislation: Legislative Strategies to Support Early Childhood Initiatives," reviewing the basic purposes and forms of legislation, including statutes, resolutions, and budgets; (3) "Legislative Strategies in Times of Budget Crisis: Case Studies of Caring Communities and Healthy Start," illustrating how advocates for Missouri's Caring Communities and California's Healthy Start influenced their state legislatures to restore some of the programs' funding; and (4) "The Art of Advocacy (for Everyday People)," offering basic guidelines for educating and working with policymakers at all government levels, including identifying the problems, building coalitions, getting to know key policymakers, becoming a source of information, understanding the process, making ideas heard, and supporting policymakers who support the advocate's issues. The brief concludes with a list of additional resources on financing early care and education initiatives. (KB)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original document.

ED 477 954

Supporting Early Childhood Initiatives

LEGISLATIVE STRATEGIES FOR EVERYDAY PEOPLE

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Martha Roherty
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
28

FINANCING STRATEGIES SERIES JUNE 2003

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

PS 031366

The FINANCE PROJECT

Supporting Early Childhood Initiatives

LEGISLATIVE STRATEGIES FOR EVERYDAY PEOPLE

by Lynn R. DeLapp

2A

Table of Contents

PREFACE 3

SUPPORTING EARLY CHILDHOOD INITIATIVES:
LEGISLATIVE STRATEGIES FOR EVERYDAY PEOPLE 7

THE ABCs OF LEGISLATION:
LEGISLATIVE STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT EARLY CHILDHOOD INITIATIVES 13

LEGISLATIVE STRATEGIES IN TIMES OF BUDGET CRISIS:
CASE STUDIES OF CARING COMMUNITIES AND HEALTHY START 21

THE ART OF ADVOCACY (FOR EVERYDAY PEOPLE) 25

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS 33

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES
ON FINANCING EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION INITIATIVES 34

OTHER RESOURCES 35

Preface

The early years of a child's development are critical to establishing a foundation for success in school and beyond. Recent research into brain development has created a great deal of excitement as it has revealed the importance of early relationships and experiences to building the social, emotional, intellectual, and academic skills that individuals rely upon throughout their lives. And ensuring that children enter school ready to learn is now a well-established national goal. Preparing young children to acquire early literacy and other fundamental academic skills and abilities is now seen as critical to achieving the high educational expectations that we have for our nation's students.

At the same time, there is growing concern about the quality of early care and learning opportunities experienced by many children and their readiness to enter the formal educational system. For example, many of the nearly 60 percent of children five years of age or younger in child care on a regular basis are in programs of substandard quality. Additionally, the growing emphasis on high educational standards and achievement for all students and the increasing attention to the importance of early literacy development lead to questions of whether we are meeting the diverse needs of all our young children in ways that will adequately prepare them for academic success.

Improving the accessibility and quality of supports and services for young children and their families, as well as other human services, thus remains an important challenge for states and communities across the country. Since 1996, the implementation of welfare reform has created new demands for job training, child care, and other transitional services among former recipients of income assistance. Higher goals for educational achievement, including boosting early literacy and other academic skills, require new investments in teachers, schools, and special programs. Health care costs continue to rise despite a decade of financing reforms. And in many towns and cities, renewing the economic and physical assets of the most disadvantaged neighborhoods is a high priority. Yet, as the economic prosperity of the late 1990s recedes and new priorities for investment have emerged with the tragic events of September 11, 2001, governments at all levels, corporations, and private philanthropies, in many cases, have fewer available resources with which to address these multiple needs.

Nevertheless, the growing body of research on early child development provides guidance on how to enable parents to manage their nurturing responsibilities while providing for their families' economic needs, as well as how to design programs and services that effectively foster healthy development and provide special support for vulnerable children and families. Across the

country, many states and localities, with support from an array of business, philanthropic, and community partners, are engaged in innovative efforts to expand and improve programs and systems of supports and services for young children and their families. To a large extent, the greatest challenge is not in knowing what constitutes high-quality supports and services for young children and their families. Rather, it is in gaining and maintaining concerted attention and resources to planning, financing, implementing, and sustaining high-quality, coherent systems that connect all the disparate state and local programs, services, and resources.

This series of products, developed with the support of the Carnegie Corporation of New York, is intended to advance the effective financing and governance of early learning supports and services in order to promote children's readiness for school. They present conceptual frameworks, an array of effective strategies, and the experiences of states and communities in advancing the early childhood agenda, financing and governing promising approaches, and implementing and sustaining initiatives to achieve positive results. The products are intended to be useful tools for policy makers, program developers, community leaders, and other decision makers who are looking for creative new ideas for policies, programs, and systems reforms and practical information on how to implement them.

This brief, *Supporting Early Childhood Initiatives: Legislative Strategies for Everyday People*, addresses strategies to ensure that policy makers hear the voices of children and families so that effective early childhood initiatives can be enacted, implemented, and sustained. It helps readers understand how they can influence the basic legislative processes of creating statutes, resolutions, budgets and appropriations, and when to use alternatives to legislation. It includes examples and lessons learned from efforts across the country to support early childhood and other child and family initiatives in good times as well as bad. And it provides key guidelines and advice for everyday people—including parents, teachers, and other service providers; members of business, religious, and community groups; and many others—for educating and working with policy makers to support initiatives that promote the well-being of young children and their families.

Cheryl D. Hayes
Executive Director

Legislative strategies can support early childhood initiatives that promote the well-being of young children and their families.

8

Supporting Early Childhood Initiatives:
Legislative Strategies for Everyday People

Early childhood educators, health professionals, child care providers, social workers, parents, and other "everyday people" who work day in, day out with young children and their families often hesitate to become involved with policy making or politics. Although they know that legislative and government policy decisions—made at levels from the school site to the local, state, and federal government—affect their work, many see the policy-making arena as an alien world, one in which they feel ill at ease and unequipped to participate. Many do not know their policy makers and feel uncomfortable talking to them. Others may have been told that they "are not allowed to lobby" because they have grants from foundations or work for nonprofit organizations[1] or schools. All have limited time for such activity, already working long hours just to meet the needs of the children and families they serve. They prefer that other people, with different experience and skills, talk directly to policy makers.

During the last 10 years, early childhood services have finally appeared on federal, state, and local policy makers' radar screens. Efforts such as the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Kids Count have made great strides in educating policy makers on children's issues, and public leaders have become aware of the research about early brain development. They have also become better informed on pragmatic concerns about school readiness, child care for welfare recipients, and health insurance for working families. As government budgets grew with the expanding economy, policy makers acted on this knowledge, allocating additional funding to child care and early education, health and family support services, and violence prevention. In response, immunization and health insurance rates started to rise, teen pregnancy fell, and federal and state legislators even started to discuss universal preschool.

[1] Although many organizations have their own rules about advocacy and lobbying, the rules governing nonprofit organizations generally permit educating public officials on specific issues and legislation, so long as specific recommendations on voting are not made.

Over the next few years, however, many of these gains may be wiped out. Across the country, tax revenues have fallen drastically, and local and state budgets are facing huge deficits. As budgets have shrunk, we are again recognizing that policy maker support for children's services (except education) remains precarious. Instead of expanding needed programs, policy makers are placing on the chopping block both recently enacted and well-established programs serving children and families.

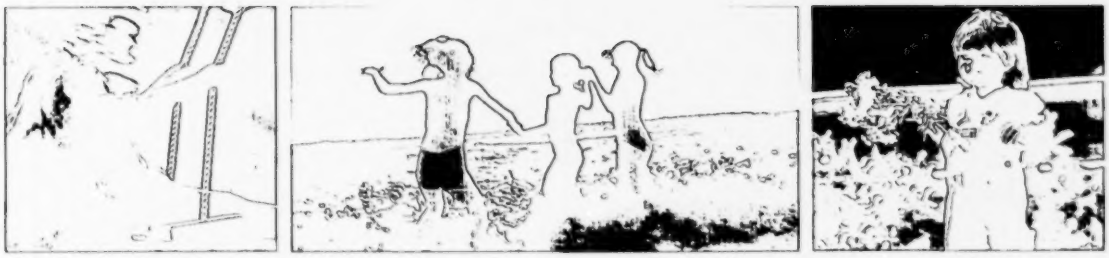
A 1995 survey of state legislative leaders reported that many policy makers remain unconvinced about the importance and effectiveness of services for young children. Their perception is that "there is no clear consensus... on what constitutes child and family issues, or on the severity of the problems facing children and families." The survey quoted one legislative leader, "On my own radar screen, when somebody says children's issues, it's soft and mushy."[2] With such widespread perceptions among high-level policy makers, children's programs remain vulnerable to budget and program cuts.

If we are to save and sustain effective programs, much less expand needed child and family services, we must better educate political leaders. In the short term, we must become effective advocates on budget and funding issues. Over the long term, we must work together, through better information and accountability, to exempt these services altogether from expansion-contraction funding cycles. Not only must we actively and effectively inform policy makers about programs' effects on their constituents, but also we must improve the credibility, accountability, and efficiency of services for children and families by implementing systems that objectively measure the effects of programs on the children, families, and communities they serve and by making these assessments public.[3] All these efforts will require that we learn when and how to use advocacy and legislative strategies.

Who is "we"? Any service provider or school teacher dependent on public funding and every parent who uses government services or public education for his or her child is included. So is anybody who cares about raising all children to be educated, productive citizens. In fact, programs and policies enacted by local, state, and federal policy makers affect us all. This strategy brief is written as a "how-to" primer for those of us who never saw ourselves in the world of policy making and politics, but who care too much to let effective services and programs die. This brief explores when to use legislative rather than

[2] Margaret Blood, *State Legislative Leaders: Keys to Effective Legislation for Children and Families* (Centerville, MA.: State Legislative Leaders Foundation, 1995), 14.

[3] For more information on accountability for early childhood programs, see Lynn DeLapp, *Accountability Systems: Improving Results for Young Children* (Washington, D.C.: The Finance Project, October 2002).



alternative strategies, and reviews the basic purposes and forms of legislation. It also provides guidelines–do's and don'ts– for grassroots advocacy on early childhood issues for everyday people.

ALTERNATIVES TO LEGISLATION

The first rule of advocacy is to avoid legislation unless there is no other choice. Working at the local or state level to enact changes in the law or fund new programs is time-consuming, costly, and risky. It may take weeks, months, or even years of patience to refine a legislative proposal, persuade policy makers of its benefits, negotiate changes, be available to answer questions, testify at committee hearings or community meetings, and shepherd the idea through the legislative process. Such a process is costly in terms of staff and volunteer time, travel expenses, and other resources.

Legislation is also inherently risky. Your great idea inevitably will be changed as it progresses through the scrutiny and give-and-take of the legislative process; it may even be transformed into something totally different and unacceptable by the time the final votes are taken. And even if your proposal is enacted, it may not be implemented as you intended, depending on funding priorities, administrative reluctance, feasibility problems, lawsuits, and other factors beyond your control.

Alternatives to legislation include:

- *LOCAL ACTION*

  (If it isn't clearly prohibited, just do it.)

  Not every new policy or program requires legislation. If you believe that your change or good idea is not explicitly prohibited and falls within your discretion, and if it does not rely on new public money, there may be nothing to stop you from going ahead and implementing it. Be bold. It is often better to ask forgiveness after the fact than permission beforehand.

- *ADMINISTRATIVE SOLUTIONS*

  Sometimes, state or local government administrators or school officials have the authority to meet your need without going to a policy-making body. Before seeking legislation, exhaust potential administrative channels. Explain your issue and situation, and ask state or local government administrators if they can approve your request.

The Power of Children's Councils

Throughout the country, leaders from government agencies, schools, and nonprofits, as well as community residents, have formed children's councils to identify and jointly address the needs of children and families in their communities. Using their discretionary power, government and community leaders have been able to combine and focus existing resources and programs to accomplish such goals as reducing child abuse (Vermont) and teenage drinking (Santa Cruz County, California).

Cornelius Hogan, *Vermont Communities Count* (Baltimore, MD, Annie E. Casey Foundation, 1999); and www.RAguide.org/santa_cruz_teen_alcohol.htm.

- *PRIVATE FUNDING*

  Seeking public funding automatically puts you in the position of competing with others for limited dollars that are controlled by policy makers who may not agree with your priorities. If you need funding to try out new ideas or to meet other short-term needs, first seek funding from private foundations, businesses, or individuals rather than statutory authority. Many private philanthropic foundations, as well as businesses, support efforts for children and families. On a national level, retailers such as the Mervyn's and Target stores regularly fund early childhood development and education. Local hospitals often support child health initiatives, and chambers of commerce and service clubs frequently sponsor efforts benefiting children's services, ranging from "fun runs" to construction of child care centers or community pools.

- *BULLY PULPIT*

  Not every idea needs a legislative platform. Sometimes, you just need public recognition that "something needs to be done," followed by media attention, speeches by community leaders, joint action by parents, and similar actions that can be taken without legislative involvement.

Using the Bully Pulpit

Following reports of sky-high teen pregnancy rates, the citizens of Tillamook, Oregon, decided to do something about it. Aroused by community concern, the health department changed procedures for scheduling teen health appointments, churches started afterschool programs, the schools improved sex education, parents talked to their children about health risks, and nonprofit organizations added additional services for teens. Within a year, with no legislation and almost no new money, the pregnancy rate plummeted.

Mark Friedman, *The Results and Performance Accountability Implementation Guide* (www.RAguide.org).

- *VOTER INITIATIVES AND REFERENDA*

Some state constitutions permit voters to gather signatures and place issues directly on the ballot. While they may avoid legislative logjams, voter initiatives are not without problems. They are extremely expensive, due to the cost of gathering a large number of signatures. They may also be inflexible. In some states, the wording of the initiative cannot be changed except by another vote of the people, even if it turns out to be unworkable.

Examples of Early Childhood Initiatives and Referenda

In 1998, the citizens of California passed the Children and Families First Act, a ballot initiative that raised tobacco taxes by one dollar on every pack of cigarettes, to fund programs for children from birth to age five.

Also in 1998, a Georgia constitutional referendum made the state's voluntary pre-kindergarten education program for four-year-olds the second-highest priority (after HOPE college scholarships) for state lottery funds.

Information on the California Children and Families First Act may be found at www.ccfc.ca.gov; for the Georgia pre-kindergarten program, see The Child Care Partnership Project, *Case Studies of Public-Private Partnerships for Child Care* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families Child Care Bureau, n.d.), 21–32.

The ABCs of Legislation:
Legislative Strategies to Support Early Childhood Initiatives

Sometimes, legislation is your best option. There are three basic forms of legislative activity: creation of statutes, resolutions, and the budget. Statutes create and change law, whereas resolutions generally proclaim the intent or will of a legislative body. Budgets allocate or restrict funding for program implementation.

STATUTES

Statutes must be passed by both houses[4] of a state legislature and signed by the governor or by the governing board of a local government.

Creating and Funding Policies and Programs

Policy: New York State and Contra Costa County, California, have enacted legislation requiring that all relevant proposals contain a "children's impact statement" before the legislation can be approved by the legislative body or chief executive. This statement describes the impact, if any, of the measure on children and families, or on improving specific outcomes for children and families.

Programs: In 2001, the Florida legislature created the Florida Partnership for School Readiness. The purpose of this program is to "foster collaboration and systemic change through local school readiness coalitions to ensure that all children are emotionally, physically, socially, and intellectually ready to enter school and ready to learn..."

Funding: Legislation can be used to implement a variety of strategies to increase funding for early childhood services, including:

- pooling funds from several programs into a unified funding stream;
- broadening or removing narrow eligibility and administrative requirements governing specific funding streams;
- imposing or increasing user fees for services;
- creating new taxing districts, with taxing authority dedicated to a specific purpose;
- adding on to existing taxes with additional revenues earmarked for specific programs or services; and
- implementing income tax check-offs, which allow taxpayers to designate a portion of their tax liability or their refund to specific programs.

Contra Costa County, CA, Board of Supervisors. *Children's Accountability Act for Contra Costa County* (January 27, 1998, and September 19, 1995); and http://www.myflorida.com/myflorida/government/governorinitiatives/schoolreadiness.

[4] Except Nebraska, which has a unicameral (single house) legislature.

Amending Smart Start

Since North Carolina's Smart Start program was enacted by the General Assembly in 1993, the program has been amended five times. Although the basic intent and focus of the program—to ensure that every child enters school healthy and ready to succeed through community-based provision of high-quality child care, family support, and health care—remains unchanged, amendments have authorized local partnerships to accept state funding, expanded the program to all 100 counties, and initiated a performance-based budgeting process.

Information on Smart Start is available on its website: www.ncsmartstart.org/overview/history and www.ncsmartstart.org/overview/legislation.

Generally, statutes are used to:

- *Create and fund new programs or policies.*
- *Change (amend) provisions of existing programs or statutes.*
- *Require, restrict, or prohibit certain actions by specified individuals or groups.*

  These types of statutes may prohibit unlawful acts (e.g., child abuse) or impose regulations (e.g., adult-child ratios for child care) to protect children, families, and communities.
- *Authorize or "enable" an individual, agency, or organization to carry out a program or activity.*

  (State legislation required to implement federal programs is also called "enabling legislation.")
- *Encourage or provide incentives.*

  Statutes may provide funding, tax breaks, or other incentives to encourage implementation of new ideas. Increased regulatory flexibility is an incentive strategy that has proved valuable, particularly in lean budget years when for program funding implementation may not be available.

RESOLUTIONS

Resolutions, which do not have the force of law, may be enacted by a single house, both houses of a legislature, or by a local governing body. They do not require the governor's signature, and may be used to:

- *Document the intent of the legislature.*

  "Intent language" may serve as a preamble to a bill proposing a statutory change or may stand alone as part of a resolution. This language may describe a problem or explain the reasoning behind a proposed solution.
- *Educate the public about a problem or issue.*

  Another form of the "bully pulpit," a resolution may be used to declare the legislature's concern about anything from lack of high-quality child care to global warming to traffic congestion, without prescribing any specific solutions.

Authorizing Administrative Structures for Hawaii's Healthy Start

Legislation on Hawaii's Healthy Start home visiting program for mothers and infants authorizes eight private organizations across the state to administer the program under the Maternal and Child Health branch of the state's Department of Health.

- *Provide recognition to an individual, worthy cause, or auspicious occasion.*

  Resolutions are often formal declarations from the legislature, honoring an individual, proclaiming National Ice Cream Week, or recognizing outstanding achievement.

BUDGETS AND APPROPRIATIONS

Another major legislative strategy involves budgets and appropriations. Legislators can create far-reaching programs for children and families through statutes; but if funding is not allocated in the budget for implementation or ongoing operations, the programs remain mere words on paper. Although the budget process is far less understood by the general public and by those responsible for children's services, it is probably more important for establishing state or local government policy than either resolutions or statute making.

"The state [or local government] budget bill, the single most important item on any legislative calendar, serves as the policy document for the states by defining annual fiscal priorities."

"Ninety percent of all this stuff boils down to budget decisions. You have to be in on the budget process, close to the people who ultimately decide."[5]

Funding and Regulatory Incentives in Iowa and California

Programs: Iowa's decategorization program for child welfare services allows participating counties to blend specific state funds and to reinvest savings generated by the program.

Regulatory Flexibility: California's Youth Pilot Program (AB 1741), enacted in 1993, offered six counties the opportunity to seek waivers of state laws and regulations so they could blend funds or develop innovative administrative strategies grounded in outcomes-based plans to better serve low-income children and families.

[5] Blood, *State Legislative Leaders*, 10.

Legislatures and local governments typically enact annual or biannual spending plans (budgets), which show expected revenues from taxes, the federal government, and other sources, and then allocate those funds among departments and programs.

To advocate effectively for specific funding priorities for children and families, it is extremely important to learn the timeframes used by the state or local government in constructing the budget and appropriations bills, and to work closely with the key players involved in making budget decisions. Typically, months before budget deadlines, program administrators in the executive branch estimate their spending needs and priorities and provide them to the governor or chief administrator's office. The chief executive is then responsible for devising the overall spending plan—the proposed budget—for the state, county, school district, city, or other jurisdiction. The proposed budget is sent to the legislative

Using Tobacco Settlement Monies in Maine

In 1999, tobacco settlement monies were appropriated by the Maine legislature to establish the Fund for a Healthy Maine and the Trust for a Healthy Maine. The Fund supports children and family services, including child care subsidies; school services for youth; incentives for child care providers to offer care during odd hours, in underserved areas, and to at-risk children with special needs; and grants to reduce tobacco use and tobacco-related diseases.

More information and examples of programs funded by state tobacco settlement monies can be found in *Using Tobacco Settlement Revenues for Children's Services: State Opportunities and Actions* (Washington, D.C.: The Finance Project, October 1999).

body, which analyzes the spending plan, holds hearings, and makes changes to fit its own priorities. These hearings are open to the public and provide opportunities for private citizens and local agencies to testify regarding recommended budget changes or in support of or in opposition to specific funding proposals. Like any bill, the state budget must be approved by the legislature and then signed by the governor.[6]

Although the budget, once adopted, can be revised by appropriations bills (based, for example, on increased or decreased revenues or unexpected needs), policy makers generally avoid reopening budget negotiations and spending decisions. Thus, most funding decisions are made only once every one- or two-year cycle, and program administrators and advocates have to live with the results.

Even in "good" budget years, when the economy is good and tax money has rolled in, there is never enough money to fund everything needed or wanted by legislators and advocates. Moreover, depending on their political philosophy about the size and scope of government, some policy makers will always push for tax and spending cuts, while others seek expansion of revenues and funding for the programs they consider most important.

A STATE OR LOCAL BUDGET CAN:

- *Fund all or pieces of programs.*

  Based on available revenues, budget priorities, and, in some cases, statutory restrictions, the legislature and governor can choose to fully or partially fund programs.

- *Require agencies or programs to show progress on performance measures related to expenditures.*

  During the last few years, legislative budget committees have become far more active in reviewing programs and expenditures to see if they are accomplishing their desired results.

Maryland's Legislature Reviews Performance Measures

In 2001, the Maryland legislature held a budget hearing examining all expenditures from multiple agencies and programs targeted toward meeting one of the state's eight core results for children and families—children entering school ready to learn. Representatives from each agency were asked to describe to the budget committee how their programs and activities contributed to school readiness and how they were working with the other agencies to accomplish this result.

Susan Robinson, *Improving Children's Lives: A Tool Kit for Positive Results, Financing Tools Number Four: Budgeting Tools* (Denver, CO: National Conference of State Legislatures, 2001).

[6] While most states require only a simple majority vote to pass budget or appropriations bills, three states (Arkansas, California, and Rhode Island) require a "supermajority" approval of two-thirds or three-fourths of the legislative body. Six other states require a supermajority under certain conditions.

- *Provide additional information on investments for children and families by categorizing all expenditures for children across agencies and departments.*

- *Essentially nullify a statute by not funding implementation.*

  Statutory enactment of a new program does not always guarantee its implementation. Any compilation of state or local statutes includes good ideas passed by the legislature and signed by the governor that, for any number of reasons, were never funded. Possibly, the new program was a low priority and lost out during budget negotiations. Perhaps revenues were too low. Maybe the legislature and governor enacted the law for political reasons, but never funded it. Perhaps the "great idea" turned out, on closer examination, to be unworkable.

- *Delete funding for programs.*

  Programs can disappear overnight when funding is cancelled. Sometimes, a program is ineffective or loses political support from a new governor or legislative leader. When there are drastic drops in state revenues, almost anything can happen. Funding for even well-established, effective programs for children and families can be deleted or slashed.

Using Children's Budgets to Categorize Expenditures

Children's budgets developed by two California counties, Los Angeles and Contra Costa, provide a cross-systems view of all county services for children. Supplementing the counties' traditional line-item budgets, they group items by spending categories (e.g., health, foster care) or by outcome areas (e.g., healthy children, safe communities, school readiness). These budgets help identify overlaps, gaps, and areas for improving efficiency and collaboration, and provide information on how specific expenditures contribute to desired results.

County of Contra Costa, Children and Family Services Budget, 2001–2002; Jacquelyn McCroskey, *The Children's Budget of Los Angeles County Government, 1980–1999* (Los Angeles, CA: Los Angeles Children's Planning Council, 1999).

To advocate effectively for specific funding priorities for children and families, it is extremely important to learn the timeframes used by the state or local government

Legislative Strategies in Times of Budget Crisis

Legislative Strategies in Times of Budget Crisis: Case Studies of Caring Communities and Healthy Start

Throughout the country, 2002 was a dismal year for state government budgets. In January 2002, as governors released their 2002–2003 budget proposals, two well-established, highly respected state-local initiatives, Missouri's Caring Communities and California's Healthy Start, were targeted for drastic cuts. Caring Communities was to lose approximately two-thirds of its funding, which would mean the demise of many Community Partnerships; the allocation for new three-year grants for Healthy Start was reduced to zero. In both states, advocates for the programs sprang into action.[7]

In Missouri, as soon as the governor's budget proposal was released, the 21 local Community Partnerships and the public-private Family and Community Trust (FACT) board, which oversees the initiative, reacted. FACT staff provided data and speaking points to the Community Partnerships and assisted with identifying key legislators who would influence the legislative budget review. The Community Partnerships organized a massive "legislative day" in Jefferson City, the state capital, where representatives from partnerships all over the state ate breakfast with their local legislators and then spent the day canvassing the capitol to build support for increased funding. A major letter-writing campaign was launched, and parents, service providers, businesses, and the faith community wrote, emailed, and visited their representatives, and even buttonholed them in the supermarket. These efforts paid off. By the time the Caring Communities budget cleared the first legislative house, the General Assembly, all funding had been restored.

[7] Information in this section is based on telephone interviews with Lynn Tiede, Family and Community Trust, Missouri Caring Communities Initiative; Michele Hobza, Sacramento City Unified School District; and Michelle Harper, Consumers Union.

But then the other shoe fell. By May, it was clear that tax revenues were even lower than predicted, and the governor repeated his call for deep cuts. The Senate complied, sending the Caring Communities allocation to the budget conference committee to resolve the difference. Advocacy efforts from the Community Partnerships continued, supplemented by reports showing that the partnerships were making significant progress on their outcomes and indicators. The budget allocation that emerged from the legislature and was signed by the governor split the difference between the General Assembly and the Senate. Although the Caring Communities initiative ultimately suffered a 40-percent cut, the reduction was much less stringent than the original proposal. The Partnerships could survive. The advocacy efforts were considered a major success.

In California, removal of the Healthy Start allocation from the governor's proposed budget came as a complete shock. Although the 10-year-old program, providing school-linked health, education, recreation, social services, and other supports to children and families, had lost visibility in the legislature, it was generally considered a valuable, successful effort.

Evaluations had shown that schools with Healthy Start programs had higher academic achievement among low-performing students, that basic needs for food and clothing were being addressed, and that parents and teachers valued the services.

After an initial period of hand wringing, a few concerned, passionate individuals decided that they were not going to let the defunding stand. Starting with no existing advocacy structure, a state rule that educational agencies could not lobby, and no knowledge of the budget process, they cobbled together a disparate coalition composed of the Consumers Union, the National Association of Social Workers, the Sacramento City Unified School District, and others. They pulled together data showing the effectiveness of the program and the fact that local Healthy Start sites averaged $4 in federal funding for every state dollar spent on the program. They developed a list of influential legislators and gathered anecdotes about the impact of Healthy Start. The Sacramento school district hired a professional education lobbyist to fight the budget battle, and several other districts lent their lobbyists to the effort.

Then the coalition went statewide. School district superintendents, school principals, Healthy Start site coordinators and regional representatives, parents, the faith community, and many, many others were urged to contact their legislators. Other groups supporting child and adolescent health, including social workers,

afterschool programs, and school administrators, added restoration of Healthy Start to their own "policy education" priorities. An independent consultant volunteered to create a website, www.restorehealthystart.com, which offered sample letters, fact sheets, anecdotes, and legislative contact information, as well as day-by-day action steps, to guide advocacy efforts. The effort also gained media attention. By April, legislators were receiving thousands of letters, emails, and phone calls urging them to restore funding. Hundreds of people showed up at the key legislative budget hearings.

As in Missouri, the message reached the legislators, and both houses agreed to restore full one-year funding (rather than the previous three-year funding) to the budget. When the budget reached the governor's desk, however, most of the restored funding ($17 million of the $19 million) was placed in a "set-aside" account that may be used for other educational purposes. The overall budget outlook for California over the next few years remains extremely grim, with an estimated $8 billion deficit projected for next year, on top of this year's $23.4 billion imbalance. The future of Healthy Start will continue to hang in the balance for at least the next two or three years.

LESSONS LEARNED

Several lessons can be learned from the Missouri and California budget battles.

- *Don't allow your successful programs to lose visibility with legislators.*

  These programs should never have been considered for serious cuts. Make sure that legislators continue to hear about the value of your program or initiative.
- *Coalitions are critical.*

  To the extent possible, use existing networks and keep them active. Diverse partners can appeal to a broader group of legislators and provide the people and other resources needed to do the job.
- *Everyday people who care about a program can make a huge difference.*

  With a little assistance, they will write letters, make phone calls, and visit their representatives.
- *A website can be extremely valuable in getting the word out quickly.*
- *Evaluation data and information on how much additional federal funding has been brought into the state or community as a result of the program are persuasive to legislators.*
- *Hiring a professional lobbyist to interpret legislative actions and guide advocacy efforts is very helpful.*
- *It is difficult but essential to keep passion alive over the months of the legislative process.*
- *Lobbying prohibitions for nonprofit organizations generally do not cover activities to educate policy makers.*

The Art of Advocacy
(for Everyday People)

There are basic guidelines for educating and working with policy makers at all levels of government. The following advice, drawn from the experience of long-time legislative staff, as well as state and local advocates for children, is as applicable to parents, teachers, or early childhood service providers who are making phone calls to their school board member or city council member, as it is to paid professional lobbyists.

CLEARLY IDENTIFY YOUR PROBLEM OR ISSUE AND DO YOUR HOMEWORK

Take the time to clearly define what actions or decisions you would like from a policy maker. Ask yourself several questions:

- *What early childhood issues are most pressing to my children (or city or state)?*
- *Which ones will policy makers and the public care about?*

  The range of possible issues is extensive – from access, cost, and quality of child care to pre-natal care, childhood autism, and school readiness. Be aware of which issues this year are sparking deep concern among the public and policy makers. Make sure that you have evidence that the problem is urgent and troubling to other parents or to the public.
- *What is the best solution to this problem?*

  Be willing to put time into researching your proposal. Be able to respond to questions describing who, and how many children, will be affected by this policy or program change. Provide evidence that your approach is both effective and cost-efficient.
- *Does your solution require legislation or public funding? Are there other ways to address this issue?*

If the issue can be addressed without legislation or public funding, find alternative, creative solutions.

- *Is the proposal realistic and feasible? What will it cost? Who will implement it?*

  Legislative proposals for early childhood programs require extensive planning, often lasting many months. At a minimum, a proposal for a new program must describe:

  - why the program is needed;
  - whom—and how many children and families it will serve;
  - what the program will accomplish, and how performance will be measured;
  - who at the state, local government, or school level will administer the program; and
  - the costs of the program and how it will be funded.

- *What kind of support do you have?*

  Determine who else is speaking out for this proposal and identify which groups and legislators will likely support this idea. It is equally important to distinguish who is likely to be opposed, especially if your opposition consists of key legislators.

If you have more than one idea or proposal, put them in priority order, using the criteria of need, cost, feasibility, and expenditure of time necessary to educate and persuade policy makers. Recognize that you may not have the time or resources to accomplish all your priorities.

BUILD COALITIONS

One of the first questions a policy maker is likely to ask is, "Who else supports this idea?" Ideas rarely become policy, budget allocations, or law unless they draw from a broad base of support. By taking the time to build alliances, whether among other parents at a school or among statewide organizations serving children, you can show that the idea is important enough to garner support from others. These coalitions can also provide the people, time, and energy necessary for sustaining your efforts through the political process.

Make sure, however, that you have your act together—that your allies are truly in agreement with both your "good idea" and its importance. Policy makers have little patience for advocates who appear to disagree. And once credibility is lost, it is rarely regained.

get to know policy makers

GET TO KNOW KEY POLICY MAKERS AND UNDERSTAND WHAT MAKES THEM TICK

Several generalizations apply to elected policy makers, whether they are city council members, county commissioners, school board members, legislators, or members of Congress:

- *They care about serving the public, particularly their constituency, and sought election to make a difference.*
- *They care about children and families, although their approaches may vary based on individual experiences and political philosophy.*
- *They want to receive credit (and be reelected) for their accomplishments.*
- *They need good, reliable information to do their job well.*

Effective advocates take the time to get to know the policy makers who represent them. At the grassroots level, this usually means the city council members, county commissioners, school board members, and legislators from your specific area. Learn a bit about their philosophy of public service and what motivates them. Research their legislative priorities and determine if your ideas can be aligned with their interests. Learn their committee assignments and their role, if any, in budget deliberations.

Do not make assumptions about policy makers' support for children and families based on their political affiliation or whether they categorize themselves as "liberal" or "conservative." Child and family issues encompass a broad spectrum

Going Beyond the "Usual Suspects"

The public-private Educare Colorado initiative is spearheaded by a coalition of leaders from business, foundations, early education, health, and religious communities working to create a statewide early education system. In partnership with the state, the nonprofit organization is working on four fronts: parent education, public education, quality improvement, and evaluation. Over one-quarter of a $40 million fundraising goal was met in the organization's first year, and the system has started to provide early childhood education services to as many as 94,000 children in four counties.

The coalition to pass California's Afterschool Partnership and Safe Neighborhoods program included not only school, child development, and recreation advocates, but also law enforcement representatives, who emphasized that organized afterschool programs would likely prevent crimes by and against youth during the hours when most high-risk behavior occurs.

The Child Care Partnership Project, Case Studies of Public-Private Partnerships for Child Care (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families Child Care Bureau, n.d.), 11–20.

from education to child abuse, and from immunizations to juvenile crime. Politicians are likely to support some issues and oppose others based on the specifics of the issue, how it relates to their constituency, cost, and many other factors.

BECOME A "SOURCE"

Policy makers need solid information on a broad range of subjects to do their job well. They usually seek information through a network of friends, colleagues, and others. Most important, they want solid, reliable, and pertinent information, and they want to know the pros and cons of every issue. There are many ways to become a source:

- *Become a local informant on your specific area of child and family services.*

  Be proactive. When an issue related to your expertise emerges, send your representative a one-page information sheet outlining the issue, local effects, pros and cons, and your well-reasoned recommendation for action. Emails are fine. After a while, if your information proves useful and reliable, the policy maker is likely to start seeking your advice about related issues.

- *Visit your representative.*

  All policy makers, even those who spend a lot of time in the state capital or Washington, D.C., keep in touch with constituents and their electoral district. When they are in town and focused on local issues, schedule either a "meet and greet" appointment to introduce yourself or a more substantive meeting to present specific information to them. In either case, respect their time by being brief and to the point.

- *Better yet, invite policy makers to visit your program.*

  If you are involved with a school, preschool program, family resource center, teen parent program, or any other type of service program funded by public money, invite your representatives to visit. In many cases, they will jump at the opportunity to get out of the office, see what is really going on, and make their own judgments about the program. Make sure you schedule a time when children or their parents are available, and when there is an interesting activity. Provide the policy maker with specific information on your activities and successes, as well as your needs. And it doesn't hurt to have a camera handy to capture pictures with cute children for the policy maker's office wall, or even (with permission) to invite the local newspaper to report on the visit.

- *Get to know the representative's staff, and never underestimate their value.*

  Staff are policy makers' eyes and ears in the local community, and also organize and protect their time. A rule of thumb is to treat staff well: They are much more likely to convey your message to their boss and to portray you and your issues in a favorable light. Staff—from the receptionist who answers the phone to key legislative aides—are responsible for three key tasks: to

research issues, solve constituent problems, and be a conduit of information to their boss. Get to know them, treat them with respect, and ask them to convey your messages.

TIMING IS EVERYTHING

Issues come and go in cycles. One year, politicians seem to dedicate most of their time and focus on education, another year on energy problems, and in yet another year they may emphasize crime and punishment legislation. The sad truth is that in a year when the politicians are focused on building a new jail, raising test scores, or solving an energy crisis, they are less likely to focus extensively on other issues. Although it is not impossible to get your issues addressed in an "off" year, your chance of capturing their attention is diminished. On the other hand, if it happens to be a "kids and education year," go for it.

Bad budget years tend to eclipse other priorities. When policy makers are faced with making large budget cuts, even to successful, long-established programs, they do not want to hear about your new, wonderful, costly idea that will save kids' lives or improve reading scores, unless you can identify savings or new, outside sources of funding. However, policy makers also do not want to look like the bad guys. In lean budget years, look for creative low- or no-cost solutions.

UNDERSTAND THE PROCESS

At every level of government, from school site council to the federal government, there is a prescribed process with established deadlines for ideas to become law or for funding proposals to become part of the budget. While professional lobbyists are hired to understand the intricacies of these processes at the higher levels of government, even grassroots advocates should learn the basics, including:

- deadlines, if any, to introduce or pass bills;
- the committees assigned to hear the bill and their members;
- deadlines in the budget process;
- how to convey support or opposition to a proposal, bill, or budget idea; and
- how to make changes to (amend) legislation as it makes its way through the process.

There are many ways to learn the process, from books and information pamphlets to meeting with lobbyists and policy makers' staff.

make your ideas heard

IDENTIFY CHAMPIONS WHO WILL SUPPORT YOUR PROPOSAL

If possible, enlist the support of powerful, well-known, well-respected individuals in your advocacy efforts. Even if their knowledge of your issue is limited, leaders such as those from the business, labor, health care, and religious communities can be very helpful in gaining access to policy makers or in becoming spokespersons for your cause. Frequently, policy makers care about who supports an idea as much as its content. Moreover, they want to hear these ideas from trusted, influential voices.

MAKE YOUR IDEAS HEARD

If you feel strongly about an issue, bill, or budget item, make sure your voice is heard. Numbers count. Organize your allies and, at every stage of the process, make calls and send letters, emails, and faxes both to your local representatives and to members of the committees assigned the bill or budget item. Most policy makers keep a tally of constituent calls and record how many constituents support and oppose each issue. Finally, if you testify before policy makers, be quick, precise, to the point, and very respectful of the time and stature of the policy makers. You usually will be given no more than one to five minutes to state and explain your support or opposition. Make the most of the opportunity.

BE WILLING TO DEDICATE MANY HOURS TO THE CAUSE

The policy-making process is slow and onerous. Political leaders have to be educated on the issues and persuaded to your point of view, one by one. Constituents and allies have to be brought on board. Strategies must be devised. Opposing views must be negotiated and reconciled again and again, at each stage of the process. Votes must be found. Depending on your issue, whom you are trying to influence, the number and strength of your allies, and the size of your community, you may need to spend only a small amount of time writing letters or calling policy makers. Or you may need to devote hundreds of hours over weeks and months.

SUPPORT POLICY MAKERS WHO SUPPORT YOU

Politics is based on give and take. You are much more likely to persuade politicians to actively support your issues if you also support them. If a policy maker has been responsive to your children's needs, carried a bill for your organization, or worked hard to save your program from budget cuts, consider helping him or her during the next election campaign. Walk a precinct, host a coffee, make phone calls, or write a check. You should *never, ever, ever* link a campaign donation to a specific vote, however. That is illegal, unethical, and likely to spoil any ongoing relationship with a policy maker.

BE PATIENT AND NEVER GIVE UP

Some of the most important legislation on the books has taken years to achieve. It sometimes takes years for policy makers or the public to recognize the importance of your issue and become willing to support it. Other times, you may have inadvertently selected a legislator to carry your bill who is out of favor with the legislative leadership; your political strategies backfire; or it is a bad budget year. If you have a good idea and can support it, try again. And again. And again.

Although legislation, policy making, and advocacy are not for the faint-hearted, they are critical to creating new ways to serve children and to sustaining effective programs. Improving the lives of children and families will take everybody working together, both in our day-to-day jobs and in the city council; county commissioner; and school board chambers; the state legislature; and Congress.

Acknowledgments

This strategy brief was authored by Lynn R. DeLapp, a consultant to The Finance Project. Cheryl D. Hayes and Carol Cohen provided oversight and guidance, and Ms. Cohen and Martha Roherty managed the production of the brief. The author is indebted to the state and local leaders who contributed their knowledge and wisdom about the initiatives described in this piece. The Finance Project would also like to thank the Carnegie Corporation of New York for their generous support of this publication.

Additional Resources on Financing Early Care and Education Initiatives

THE FINANCE PROJECT PUBLICATIONS

A Guide to Developing and Using Family and Children's Budgets
by Mark Friedman and Anna Danegger, August 1998

Accountability Systems: Improving Results for Young Children
by Lynn R. DeLapp, October 2002

Adapting to Changing Conditions: Accessing State Tobacco Settlement Revenue for Out-of-School Time and Community School Initiatives
by Carol Cohen and Victoria Wegener, December 2000

Building Strong Communities: Crafting a Legislative Foundation
by Lynn R. DeLapp, Thomas Woods et al. December 1996

Creating Dedicated Local Revenue Sources for Early Care and Education
by Barbara Hanson Langford, April 2000

Sustaining Comprehensive Community Initiatives: Key Elements for Success
April 2002

The Child Care Partnership Project. ***Case Studies of Public-Private Partnerships for Child Care***
Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families Child Care Bureau, n.d.

Thinking Broadly: Financing Strategies for Comprehensive Child and Family Initiatives
by Cheryl D. Hayes, March 2002

Using the Community Reinvestment Act to Help Finance Initiatives for Children, Families, and Communities
by Debbie Gruenstein, April 2002

Using Tobacco Settlement Revenues for Children's Services: State Opportunities and Actions
by Lee Dixon, Patrick Johnson, and Nicole Kendell, Washington, D.C.: National Conference of State Legislatures and Carol Cohen and Richard May, The Finance Project, October 1999

Other Resources

Analysis of Florida School Readiness Act, available at:
http://www.myflorida.com/myflorida/government/Governorinitiatives/schoolreadiness

Blood, Margaret. ***Passing Children's Legislation: Five Elements of a Successful Campaign***
Transcript of May 2002 speech. Urban Health Initiative, 2002; available at:
www.urbanhealth.org/print

Blood, Margaret. ***State Legislative Leaders: Keys to Effective Legislation for Children and Families***
Centerville, MA: State Legislative Leaders Foundation, 1995

California Children and Families Commission
www.ccfc.ca.gov

County of Contra Costa. ***Children and Family Services Budget, 2001–02,*** Hogan, Cornelius. ***Vermont Communities Count,*** Baltimore, MD: Annie E. Casey Foundation, 1999

Friedman, Mark, ***The Results and Performance Accountability Implementation Guide***
www.RAguide.org

Information on Smart Start is available on its website:
www.ncsmartstart.org/overview/history and www.ncsmartstart.org/overview/legislation

McCroskey, Jacquelyn. ***The Children's Budget of Los Angeles County Government, 1980–1999***
Los Angeles, CA, Los Angeles Children's Planning Council, 1999

Robison, Susan. ***Improving Children's Lives: A Tool Kit for Positive Results, Financing Tools Number Four: Budgeting Tools***
Denver, CO: National Conference of State Legislatures, 2001

1401 New York Avenue, NW, Suite 800, Washington, DC 20005 T: 202.587.1000 F: 202.628.4205 www.financeproject.org

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

NOTICE

Reproduction Basis

[X] This document is covered by a signed "Reproduction Release (Blanket)" form (on file within the ERIC system), encompassing all or classes of documents from its source organization and, therefore, does not require a "Specific Document" Release form.

[ ] This document is Federally-funded, or carries its own permission to reproduce, or is otherwise in the public domain and, therefore, may be reproduced by ERIC without a signed Reproduction Release form (either "Specific Document" or "Blanket").

P2031366